

Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2003-04
**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO
INITIAL WRITTEN QUESTION**

Reply Serial No.

HPLB(PL)053

Question Serial No.

0475

Head: 91 Lands Department Subhead(No. & title):
Programme: (3) Legal Advice

Controlling Officer: Director of Lands

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands

Question : It is mentioned in the Estimates that the Lands Department will continue to contract out to private firms the processing of applications for approval of Deeds of Mutual Covenant and for surrenders in land exchange cases. Also, there are 115 staff members under this programme. Please advise on whether the contracting out practice will continue and on the annual savings in terms of manpower and recurrent expenditure of the Lands Department. Moreover, what kinds of jobs are the existing 115 staff members currently responsible for?

Asked by: Hon. CHAN Kam-lam

Reply: Generally, the Legal Advisory and Conveyancing Office (LACO) of Lands Department contracts out selected cases when there is an increased demand of services which it cannot process in acceptable time with existing resources. It is an on-going arrangement.

Under the Enhanced Productivity Programme (EPP), LACO has deleted 13 posts in the past three years. As a result of this deletion, there is a saving in recurrent expenditure of about \$5 million a year. The saving in manpower and recurrent expenditure arising from the contracting out of services has been reflected in the overall savings achieved under the EPP.

Not all the legal and conveyancing services provided by LACO can be contracted out. Unlike the legal and conveyancing services provided by the private sector, many of the services provided by LACO cater for government land transactions which have legal and policy implications and cannot be entrusted to the private sector. For this reason, LACO has to maintain adequate staffing to continue with the provision of the various essential legal and conveyancing services.

Signature _____

Name in block letters PATRICK L C LAU

Post Title Director of Lands

Date 20.3.2003